

Derry: Unsolved by **LenaKWrites**

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Summary: Two Aspiring Paranormal Researchers Head To Derry, Maine To Uncover The Town's Secrets. They Find It...And So Much More.

1. Ch1: Arrival

Lena stared at the file of papers sitting on her lap.

"This makes no sense." She proclaimed, turning to face her friend who was in the driver's seat.

Avery threw a confused look at her before turning her attention back to driving down the road. With a sigh, Lena searched through the stack and pulled out a paper covered in graphs and charts.

"There was a study done on this town once. People seem to die or disappear at six times the national average in this town, and that's just the adult statistics. For some reason though, nothing ever seemed to have been done with the data and no one has ever bothered to investigate."

A shiver ran down Avery's spine at the facts. Her first impression of the town when Lena had brought it up, was that it would be boring as all hell. It was just some random small town in Maine, and nothing real ever went down in places like that. Though now, she wasn't so sure if that was true.

"And you're still sure you want us to investigate this town?"

Lena snorted.

"Of course!" The amount of 'duh' in her tone was not at all hidden. "We'll never get anywhere in the paranormal field if we don't go after crazy stuff, Aves."

Well, she has a point, Avery thought to herself. They'd been trying to break into paranormal science's for over a year and had no luck with finding any evidence to show for their work. She supposed it wouldn't hurt to look into the place for a few days.

"Alright." She agreed, nodding her approval in Lena's direction. "We'll check it out for a day or two, but that's it. If we find nothing, we move on and head to the next place."

Lena voiced her agreement and the two settled into silence. They still

had another 30 minutes until they hit the town, and they wouldn't have much time to relax once they arrived. Lena decided to just relax and spaced out, watching the trees fly past as Avery put the radio on an instrumental station.

After a while, she noticed that they were approaching the welcome sign for the town. She saw someone step out from behind the sign as they grew strained her eyes to try and get a better look at them. She blinked once, and then again as she got a better view. Were her contacts somehow laced with hallucinogens?, she thought, Because there was no way she was seeing a 7ft tall clown holding a red balloon standing there waving at her.....Right?

"A-avery?" She managed to stutter. "Are you seeing what im seeing right now?"

Avery looked in her direction for a moment, before turning back to the road.

"You mean the not very well kept town sign?" She asked.

Lena shook her head, not breaking eye contact with the clown as they got closer.

"No, dude, I mean the fucking strange clown standing next to it."

Said clown shot her a wink as she finished her sentence, and then proceeded to vanish into thin air. Lena had no time to process his actions as the car jerked to a stop.

"That's not funny, Len." Avery scolded, turning to look at her as she pulled off to the side of the road.. "You know I don't like clowns, and that I don't appreciate these types of jokes when im driving."

Lena thought to argue with Avery, and explain that it wasn't a joke of any sort. Though, she knew better than to start a fight over something trivial, and honestly, it wouldn't be the first time she saw something that wasn't actually there.

"Sorry, Aves, i just thought it'd be funny." She replied, determining that it was best to take the fall and bite her tongue for now.

Avery shot her an unconvinced glance, but decided to accept her apology.

"No more jokes, Len, I mean it." She commanded.

Lena held her hands up in surrender, and Avery nodded before starting the car back up. She pulled back and continued on towards the town, paying no mind as Lena looked back at the road behind them. Had she turned around, she might have noticed what Lena was staring at.

A lone, red balloon floating slowly toward the sky.

The girls found the small inn they'd booked rooms in unsurprisingly quick. In their experience, small towns weren't too difficult to navigate. Avery headed inside to find the front desk and grab their room keys, while Lena went to start grabbing their luggage from the trunk. Lena unloaded Avery's things first as they were the easiest to reach. Her own things, were not as cooperative with leaving the trunk. Her last bag was being particularly uncooperative, she cursed aloud as she gave it a harsh tug.

"Son of a bitch!" She growled in frustration.

"Wow. Most people don't call me names until i get a few words in."

Lena let out a gasp as she whirled around to face whoever had spoken. The intake of breath caught in her throat as her dark eyes landed on the man before her. He was tall, incredibly so. Though, being only an average 5'6, most people seemed tall to her. He was also rather handsome and stylishly dressed. His face was all sharp angles, complemented by lush lips, striking light eyes and perfectly tousled, cropped brown hair. He tugged the lapels of the leather jacket he wore closer to his chest as he shifted nervously from side to side. Im so stupid, she thought, I've just been staring at him.

"I-i'm sorry." She stuttered, gesturing to the trunk. "I just couldn't get my stupid bag out of the trunk."

He chuckled at the nervous tone of her voice.

"Mind if I give it a try?" He asked.

His voice was husky, but had a surprisingly high lilt to it. After a moment to consider, Lena nodded her consent. He seemed harmless so far. The stranger gestured for her to back up as he reached for her bag. He reached in, gave a small yank, and the bag was easily drawn from the trunk. He turned to her, grinning, and held out the bag for her to take. Something about his grin made her want to step back. It sent a dangerous sort of shiver down her spine.

Squashing the anxiety that had bubbled at the pit of her stomach, Lena stepped forward and grabbed her bag from him. Their hands brushed briefly and she felt a shock jolt through her.

"Thank you." She said in as warm a tone as she could muster. "I didn't think I'd be able to get it. Thought I'd have to go without half of my clothes for this trip."

He quirked an eyebrow at her statement.

"Ah, so you're just visiting town then?" He asked.

She nodded, wondering if it was wise to continue to share information with this stranger.

"My best friend and I are just here for a research project." She replied. "I'm Lena, by the way."

She extended a hand toward him. He took it and shook it slowly. She found his hand surprisingly soft, and his grip firm. He was warm for someone so pale in such a northern town. In her experience, people with darker skin like her own were always warmer. She also noted the same shock that ran through before had happened again.

"I'm Pen." He introduced, his dangerous grin returning to his lips. "If you're just visiting, I'm sure you haven't heard about the carnival going on tonight."

"Carnival?" She questioned, noting that his grin didn't make her as uncomfortable as it had only moments before.

"It's an annual one." He explained. "It's usually very entertaining."

She turned away for a moment to grab her smallest bag.

"You should come." He suggested. "We might run into each other again."

Lena turned back to him and gave him a sceptical look.

"Might?" She asked.

"If you're unlucky." He replied with a wink.

She let out a loud laugh as she turned away and picked up her last two bags.

"Len? Everything alright?"

Lena looked up to find Avery approaching the car.

"Yeah." She replied in a reassuring tone. "My new friend was just telling me about a carnival that's going on tonight."

Avery raised a brow at her sceptically.

"New friend?"

Lena nodded.

'Yeah! He-'

She turned to where he had been a moment ago and found him gone. She was shocked, and scrambled for an explanation to give to Avery.

"He-uh-had somewhere to go, but said it was annual local thing. I thought we should check it out. Might be able to talk to some locals."

Avery gave her a look of scepticism, but nodded when Lena gave her a puppy dog look.

"I suppose it wouldn't be a bad idea." Avery agreed. "But if we see a single clown, we are leaving immediately. Alright?"

Lena smiled and nodded her agreement.

"Now, let's get our bags inside."

The pair of girls gathered their things, locked up the car, and headed inside. Had either of them turned back around, they'd have seen the stranger watching them from afar. They would have also seen as he morphed back into his true form and dissipated into thin air.

2. Ch2: Carnival

Avery was not having fun. In the 20 minutes since Lena and her had arrived at the carnival, she had gotten beer spilled on her by a half drunk old man, had to deal with the smell that was present in the unkempt public bathroom, and lost track of said friend. She had tried to text and call Lena, but received no response.

Deciding it was better to move around than stay stuck in the same boring spot, Avery turned on her phone ringer and began to wander around the carnival grounds. She figured the grounds were small enough that she might run into Lena before it got too late. She passed a few rides and snack booths, before coming up to a water gun/balloon game.

She was drawn to a burst of noise, finding it to be a small group of boys openly harassing an obviously happy couple. She scowled and shook her head in disgust at the display. Of course, she thought, homophobia runs rampant in small towns like these.

She smirked as she heard as one of the couple throw insults back at the assholes trying to ruin his and his boyfriend's night. Biting her lip to contain a laugh, she watched as the teens struggled to come up with a response. After a moment, the couple turned their back on the bullies and went on their merry way.

She then noticed the small group of teens get up and attempt to slyly follow the couple. She pulled out her phone and sent a quick text to Lena. Reaching into her pocket, Avery wrapped her hand around the mace she always kept with her. Without another thought, she followed after the men, ready to intercede if necessary.

Lena cursed her own stupid squirrel attention span as she tried to retrace her steps. She had barely registered walking away from the bathrooms as she caught a whiff of the most delicious smelling treats from a nearby booth. One funnel cake later, and she was stuck wandering all alone.

"Little Lena." A somewhat familiar voice called from behind her.

She turned to find the now familiar stranger, Pen, approaching.

"I'm not little." She argued. "I happen to be of perfectly above average height."

He chuckled. Of course, she thought, someone his height must think I'm tiny.

"What are you doing here anyway?"

His lips curled into a strange sort of smile.

"I told you we might run into each other, didn't I?"

She laughed.

"I guess I am unlucky then." She replied, referencing his words from their previous exchange.

His strange smile grew into a full blown grin.

"Would you like to keep me company?" She offered. "I lost track of my friend that I came with."

Without a word, he held out his arm for her to link hers with and gestured for her to pick their destination. She took his arm, and they began to walk around the rides and booths. They made light conversation, he got some popcorn and said it was his favorite. She laughed as he made faces and joked about the popping sounds and noises of the fair.

Lena was surprised she felt so comfortable around him. He radiated this aura of danger, and yet, she found his presence soothing. Blush flushed into her cheeks as she considered the possibility that she was only so soothed because she found him attractive. He was almost inhumanly beautiful, in her opinion anyways.

Lena knew she herself wasn't always considered a stunning beauty. Her wavy, dyed blonde locks framed her round face in a flattering way, her eyes were a warm brown, and her lips were plump, much like her body. Though, that in itself was where most had a problem. Plump wasn't usually the preferred type of physique.

"-game?"

Her blush grew heavier as she realized that he had been talking while she'd spaced out. She looked up at him, avoiding his eyes, and tried to look apologetic.

"I'm so sorry, I completely spaced out, what did you say?"

"I asked if you wanted to go on a ride, or maybe play a game." He repeated his words.

She hummed, and gave a look around them before finding a place she thought would be perfect.

"Why not do both?" She suggested..

She gestured to the building a little ways away from them.

"Fun house mirrors?" He questioned. "Don't you think it'll be too hard to find your way out? We might get trapped together for days."

Lena resisted the urge to shiver at his last few words. She definitely wouldn't mind being trapped alone with him. She shook her head.

"I think it'll be fun. Plus, I'm good at these sorts of things. So you won't have to worry about being stuck with me for too long." She joked.

His expression grew serious and his eyes bore into hers as he looked down at her.

"I wouldn't mind being all alone with you for a while." He admitted.

"O-oh, I wouldn't-I mean, We could-" She mumbled, trying to recover from the rush of strange feelings at his admission. "We should head towards the fun house, before the line gets long."

He was very obviously holding back giggles..

"Lead the way, little Lena." His playful grin and teasing tone were back, and yet, she could still feel the undercurrent of something more serious in his tone.

She tugged his arm and led him in the right direction. She swore she could feel his eyes burning into her back the entire way. They came up to the fun house and made quick work of going inside. They walked around as the lights flashed and the mirrors seemed to move. At some point, he had taken her hand, and the feeling of his skin on hers made her feel as though she were being electrocuted. Small currents of energy seemed to be passing through them to each other.

Then, everything changed. One moment they were walking, and the next she was pressed against the mirror beside her, with his lips against hers. She felt as though she were floating. They kissed for some time before he moved. He pressed his nose against her throat and inhaled deeply.

"You smell good enough to eat." His words came out as growls against her skin.

Her eyes fluttered shut as his lips fell to her throat. He began to kiss his way down her neck, sending shivers through her. Her eyes flew open as he gave a sharp bite, but then relaxed as he began to softly suck where he'd bitten. She let her eyes wander a moment, her view landing on the mirror across from them. She could see just how disheveled her blonde hair had become, and flushed at the way his back muscles flexed as he continued his kissing and pulled her closer. She began to lean into him and relax more into his embrace...But just before her eyes shut again, his reflection shifted. Where Pen seemed to be against her a moment ago, there instead was a massive, monstrous clown.

A sharp gasp left her lips and she abruptly pulled away from him. He stepped back and raised a brow at her panicked expression.

"What's wrong, little Lena?" He asked, playfully.

The way he spoke sounded strange, menacing. The high tone that he tended to speak with sounded almost threatening, and the look in his eyes seemed to imply that he was enjoying the fear in his expression.

"N-nothing's wr-wrong." She tried to sound steady, but knew her words came out in an awkward stutter. "I-uh just realized that I've been gone from my friend for too long...I should go find her."

Without giving him time to respond, Lena pushed past him and made her way out of the house of mirrors. The cool air of the night made her shiver as it hit her skin. Suddenly, she felt as if all her senses had returned to her. She had just hung out with a complete stranger for what seemed like a solid two hours, and for some reason completely threw herself at him. She couldn't understand what the absolute hell had come over her.

Pulling her phone from her pocket, she saw that she had missed messages and calls from Avery. Cursing under her breath, she attempted to call Avery back.

"Len!" Avery answered, sounding completely out of breath. "Where are you?"

She opened her mouth to reply, but was cut off as Avery continued on.

"Nevermind, it doesn't matter. I need you to meet me at the bridge by the exits. I'll be waiting after I give my statement to the police."

Lena's heart stopped.

"Police?" She shrieked into the phone. "Avery what the hell happened?"

"I don't have time to explain, just get to the bridge."

There was beeping as Avery abruptly hung up.

Lena took a moment to breathe, and then took off to the bridge to find Avery. As she ran, a shiver ran through her. She almost felt as though someone was following her, but shrugged it off as paranoia. She felt like absolute shit for not finding her friend earlier, but all that mattered was making sure that Avery was okay.

3. Ch3: Mike

Lena arrived at the bridge to find Avery sat on the sidewalk in deep conversation with an officer. She ducked under the yellow tape that blocked her path, bypassing an officer who tried to stop her.

"Avery!" She shouted, sprinting toward her friend.

Avery's head shot up, and the officer she was speaking to turned to greet Lena.

"Len!" Avery greeted, launching herself up and into Lena's arms.

The girls embraced, each one trying to reassure the other with their tight grip. Lena pulled back and tried to get a good look at Avery. She looked shaken, cheeks flushed and eyes puffy from crying, but seemed otherwise unscathed. She kept an arm around her and murmured soothing words, then turned to the officer.

"What happened?" She asked.

His reply was not what she had been expecting. Derry hadn't seemed like such a dangerous or backwards town. Then again, they'd barely been there for a day.

The officer explained that Avery had stopped what very much may have been a hate crime in the making. She'd saved two men from being attacked and beaten by some kids. Yeah, Lena thought, that's something she'd do. Avery was never one to let injustice happen in front of her. The officer said she had been pushed down and bumped her head, but that the medics had cleared her, and that everything would be taken care of.

"You should get her back to where you're staying." The officer suggested. "Some rest will do her good."

Lena nodded and thanked the officer. He walked away and she began leading Avery back toward the main parking lot. They got in the car, and Lena was letting the engine warm up, when Avery spoke.

"I saw something staring at me.." She blurted out. "Just before the

cops came, after those kids ran off, I saw something in the trees...I thought I was going crazy with adrenaline, but then I remembered that you'd seen it too."

Lena's breath caught in her throat.

"The clown." She whispered.

Avery nodded and gripped Lena's hand tightly.

"There's something going on in this town, Len, and we have to figure out what it is."

Lena's mind raced. The clown. She remembered it from the drive into town...and that same clown was in the mirror...standing where Pen was. She drew in a shaky breath and nodded in response to Avery's statement, but also to her own. There was definitely something going on. Not just with the town, but with Pen too, and she was gonna find out what the hell was going on.

The next morning, the girls were ready to get to work. Though, they weren't sure where to start looking for information. They'd never heard of anything like a sort of killer clown monster terrorizing a small town in Maine. After doing a quick online search, Avery found that there was a small town history exhibit in the local library. She figured that would be the best place for them to start.

They walked into the library and found it silent and nearly empty. The only person around was a tall, dark skinned man who sat at the front desk. The girls approached and he flashed them a friendly smile.

"Hello, ladies." He greeted. "Welcome to the Derry public library, what can I help you with today?"

The girls smiled and returned his greeting, and then grew silent. Avery wasn't sure how to broach the subject of what they were looking for.

"We are...looking into the town history for a...university assignment."

Avery lied through her teeth. Sure, they were doing research to get

into the paranormal research graduate program, but she knew damn well that this was not part of any assignment. They both knew that the clown search was personal. Lena watched Avery stumble through her words and try to get the man to help her, and then, she noticed Avery still.

"You." She said accusingly, raising a finger to point at him. "You were there last night."

The man's expression flickered to recognition and fear before returning to his friendly smile.

"I'm sorry, miss, you must be mistaken." He replied.

Avery narrowed her eyes.

"Bullshit!" She exclaimed angrily.

She couldn't understand why he was denying it. She had seen him clear as day, talking to one of the other cops, and then going towards the trees by the sewer. He was gone for a moment, and then came back to the cop, looking frightened and excusing himself. It had all happened so fast, and he was gone long before Lena came.

"Avery!" Lena chastised, grabbing her friend's arm and trying to pull her back.

"He's lying, Len!" Avery said, turning to give Lena a look before turning back to the man. "Why are you lying? You know something, I know it! Who the hell is that clown?"

The man stilled, his eyes went wide, and he gulped. His entire demeanor shifted.

"You girls shouldn't be looking into anything like this. It's not safe." He warned.

Lena raised a brow. Okay, she thought, Avery's not crazy and this dude absolutely knows something about this.

"Please." Avery begged. "We have to know."

The man looked like he was moments from caving.

"It's already too late for us to ignore this now..." Lena explained.
"We've seen It already."

The man's brows shot up, and he took a deep breath,

"You-you've seen...It?" He stuttered.

The girls nodded.

"L-look, I can't say much here..." He admitted. "But I'm meeting tonight with some old friends who helped deal with It before. You girls can come join us and we'll figure out a plan."

The girls shared a look and nodded.

"We'll be there." Avery promised.

The man took a sticky note from his desk and scribbled some words on it. He held it out and Lena took it from them.

"It's the restaurant we're meeting at, a local chinese place." He explained. "What are your names, I'll add you to the reservation."

"Avery O'brien."

"Lena Cruz."

The girls each took a turn shaking the man's hand.

"Mike. Mike Hanlon."

4. Ch4: The Losers

The girls arrived at the restaurant early to meet with Mike. He showed them to the room he had reserved for the gathering, and attempted to explain who would be coming. The list was rather surprising.

"Mike, I mean absolutely no offense by this." Lena said, leaning back in her chair on Mike's right, disbelief clear in her face. "But I do not believe a word you have said about these friends of yours."

"You've got Bill Denbrough the famous horror writer, Beverly Marsh the famous designer, Ben Hanscom the award winning architect, and only two of your friends, an insurance agent named Eddie Kaspbrak, and a man named Stan Uris who you somehow don't know what he does, are just normal people." Avery listed, counting each person off of her finger.

Mike chuckled and nodded as he placed his water back on the table.

"I forgot to mention Trashmouth." He added.

Lena and Avery shared a look.

"What the hell kind of name is Trashmouth?" Lena questioned.

"You might know him better as Richie Tozier." Mike explained. "The comedian."

Mike raised a brow as he noticed Avery's eyes went wide and Lena gained a smirk on her lips.

"Is, uh, there something you girls need to tell me?" He asked.

Lena opened her mouth to speak but was quickly elbowed in the side by Avery, who shook her head furiously. Lena wasn't one to let a hit to her ribs stop her.

"RichieTozierisAvery'scelebritycrush!" Lena blurted out all at once.

"Len!" Avery snapped, her face growing warm and red. "Shut up!"

Mike couldn't stop the laugh that bubbled up. Wow, he thought to himself, a pretty girl with a crush on Richie, that's new. Must come with fame. He placed a hand on Avery's shoulder and smiled kindly.

"It's alright, Avery, I won't tell a soul." He promised. "Besides, no one needs to inflate Richie's already enormous ego."

They shared a laugh of relief and fell into small talk as they waited for Mike's friends to arrive.

The first to arrive was Bill. He was a kind man, with a slight stutter, a heavy 5 o'clock shadow, wearing flannel and boots. The girls complimented him on his work. What they'd read, at least.

"What do you think of my endings?" He asked.

The girls shared a look before looking back to him.

"They're great." They lied in unison.

Mike laughed heartily and the girls were glad to see him smile. From what they had seen of him, Mike hadn't looked like a very happy man, but seeing him now showed that being with a friend made him very happy.

The next to arrive was Eddie. He seemed skittish at the sight of the girls, but relaxed when Mike explained who they were and why they were there..

"I'm sorry, it's been a long time since any of us besides Mike have been in Derry, and this town has always made me jumpy." He explained.

The girls waved off his apology.

"Don't worry about it." Avery replied. "We've only been here a few days and we've already run into some crazy things here."

He gave them a look like he wasn't sure if they fully understood how crazy this town could be, but nodded. Avery smiled at him. Eddie seemed like a nice man to her, and rather attractive if she was honest. He was tall, slim, and clean shaven, with slicked back,

cropped black hair. A little nervous, but he explained that he was going through a nasty divorce and had always been an anxious person.

"You girls should have seen Eddie as a kid." Bill joked. "He was always so careful and cautious."

"Being careful has never been a bad thing, Bill." Eddie defended. "You assholes have always been too reckless."

Bill gave Eddie the finger and they shared a laugh. Avery and Lena laughed along before falling into conversation again. Lena and Bill talked about his new movie, while Avery and Eddie talked about themselves.

Eddie thought Avery was a beautiful girl. He instantly found her attractive. She was the complete opposite of his newly ex-wife. Kind, funny, and incredibly beautiful. He couldn't help but glance over her, pleased to notice that she did the same.

The last three members of Mike's friend group, which the girls had learned were collectively called the Loser's Club, arrived together. There was a nice reunion between all of the friends, and then Mike gestured for the girls to come over.

"Guys, these are some new friends of mine." He introduced. "This is Avery O'brien and Lena Cruz."

The girls waved at the new arrivals. Mike gestured to each of his friends as he introduced them.

"This is Bev."

Beverly was stunning and looked very much a fashion designer. Though, the girls noticed that she also looked very disheveled and worn. Avery thought she saw a bruise on Beverly's wrist, and made a mental note to discuss it with Lena later.

"This is Ben."

Ben, the famed architect, was a handsome guy with a big smile. The others joked about how much he had changed, and the girls found it

hard to believe he wasn't always so good looking. Ben pulled up an old photo on his phone just to prove it.

"Talk about a fucking glow up." Lena blurted causing the others to burst into laughter.

"The puberty stick hit you incredibly hard, Ben." Avery agreed.

Mike, fighting his laughter, introduced the last person.

"And this is Richie."

Avery tried not to acknowledge the knowing looks that Lena and Mike were giving her as she smiled at Richie. He was just as handsome and goofy in person as he was on tv. She had to fight the blush that was rushing to her face as he smiled back and began making jokes about his friends.

The group all sat down after the introductions and fell into easy conversation. A waitress came and they placed their orders.

The conversation between the friends came to their careers and then shifted to Avery and Lena's. Once the talk got to the paranormal, the group fell silent. Mike got to talking about It then. The clown. The while room grew tense as the discussion went on. The girls shared their own tales and found comfort in the understanding of the Loser's. They breathed a sigh of relief, all of them knowing that they weren't crazy.

The serious conversation stopped as their food arrived. As the conversation flowed, Eddie got to talking about and making fun of Richie's stand up jokes.

"You don't write your own material!" Eddie accused.

Richie smirked and shrugged.

"Believe what you want, Eddie Spaghetti."

Lena snorted and muttered under her breath.

"Avery would know if you hadn't, she's seen all of your stand up three

times over."

Avery whipped her head to face her best friend. Lena gulped as she realized that she probably hadn't said it as quietly as she thought.

Richie turned to Avery, a smug grin overtaking his face.

"You're a fan?" He asked her, the smugness of his grin was even worse in his tone.

Avery buried her head in her hands, but reluctantly nodded.

"Wow, didn't think I'd run into a fangirl in my own hometown." He teased.

Lena learned quickly that Richie Tozier didn't seem to understand the concept of killing a joker by going on and on. He seemed to get Joy from making Avery embarrassed. After a few more jabs though, he finally seemed to run out of steam.

The group shared another laugh, but Lena could tell that Avery had been close to reaching her boiling point. Lena continued eating, but stopped as she watched Richie lean close to Avery again.

"So, you want an autograph?" He teased, throwing a wink in her direction.

Avery stilled and a blush flew to her cheeks. Noticing her tensing up, Eddie threw a punch at Richie's shoulder.

"Beep Beep, Richie" Eddie snapped at him before turning to Avery. "I apologize for Trashmouth here not shutting up, he was dropped on his head too often as a child."

Richie rolled his eyes and blew a joking kiss at Eddie.

"Awww, Ed's, I'm glad to be here with you too." He flirted mockingly.

Richie turned back to Avery's direction but found her seat empty. The group all looked to see her rushing out of the room.

"Nice going, Richie." Eddie snapped.

Lena went to stand, but Eddie waved her off, offering to go check on her himself..

"Avery!" Eddie called out as he raced after her.

She was halfway out of the restaurant, when he found her. He grabbed her hand and tugged her back gently. She stopped and looked at him, frustration clear in her eyes.

"Don't go." He pleaded.

Her heart thumped in her chest. She couldn't tell if it was anxiety or embarrassment.

"I know not everyone can handle Richie's sense of humor, but everyone is having a good time. Don't let his dick behavior ruin the night."

Avery let out a sigh and let her expression soften.

"I just need a minute to myself." She explained, moving to step away.

"Do you need a cigarette or something?" He asked.

She turned back to him, her brow arched up in surprise.

"I wouldn't have taken you for a smoker, Eddie, not with the way your friends talk about you." She teased, trying to show him that she'd be fine.

"Well," He murmured, his eyes growing dark. "There's a lot of things my friends don't know about me. We've been apart for a while."

The look in his eyes sent an odd feeling down Avery's spine.

"I'm good." She replied. "I'll just be a minute."

"Alright, just don't take too long." He warned, his expression growing soft again. "It's not always safe in Derry, and I uh, we'd be worried."

She smiled to herself. Does he have a thing for me?, She thought to herself.

"I won't be long so you, I mean, everyone, won't have to worry." She replied teasingly.

Eddie chuckled and let her hand go. She hadn't even realized he'd still been holding it. She hadn't given it a second thought. It had felt so natural...so right.

With a deep breath and a slight wave in his direction, Avery turned from him and headed out the door. She stepped outside, embracing the feel of the cool air against her warm skin. She lent back against the brick wall of the building and shut her eyes. She had been enjoying the silence for a few minutes when someone spoke near her.

"You okay, kid?"

Her eyes flew open and she turned to find Richie.

"I'm not a kid." She snapped.

He flushed and rubbed a hand against his neck nervously.

"Y-yeah, I'm sorry." He stuttered out. "And I'm sorry for all the dumb shit I said inside. There's a reason they call me Trashmouth."

He chuckled, but it quickly faded to silence. She could seem him getting anxious, and decided to cut him some slack.

"It's alright, Richie, really." She stated. "I'm usually much better at taking a joke, but I'm still really shaken by all this killer clown shit."

He moved closer, taking the empty spot on the sidewalk beside her. They stood in silence for some time before Avery decided to speak. She figured it would be nice to get to know him, and she wasn't one for grudges.

"To answer your earlier question," She teased. "Yes, I am a fan."

He swiftly turned to her, his eyebrows flew up, and a wide grin spread across his lips.

"Oh really now?" He teases right back. "What's your favorite work of mine."

She took a moment to look as though she were mulling her decision over, but she already knew her answer. She'd known before he'd even finished his question.

"You did a skit on one of the late night shows. You played some sort of doctor stereotype." She began.

He murmured his recognition, and gestured for her to go on.

"It made me laugh, more than I had in a long while. It was funny, just offensive enough to make me cringe, and...you looked pretty cute in it." She finished her sentence, and attempted to look anywhere but his face. As much as she found herself liking Eddie, she'd had a crush on Richie Tozier for the longest time.

Richie's grin morphed into a smirk.

"Well, I'm glad to know that someone appreciates my humor and genius." He wiggled his eyebrows. "Though I think I should head back before I make your face any redder."

Too late for that, Avery thought. Her face was burning hotter than the sun. She watched from the corner of her eye as he walked rolled the door and opened it up. He was about to step in, when he called out to her again.

"Oh, and Avery?" She turned and looked him in the eyes. "You're pretty cute yourself."

He gave her a wink, leaving her stunned, as he walked back inside to join the others. She took a few deep breaths to calm her racing heart and stayed outside for a few moments more. She walked back in to find Lena by the fish tank, in a heated argument with a stranger. Lena looked to her and motioned for Avery to go back to the room. She did so reluctantly, leaving her friend to continue her hushed conversation.

5. Ch5: Pen or Pennywise

Eddie had gone after Avery, and Richie had gone out after him to apologize. When they both returned and assured Lena that Avery was alright, she breathed a sigh of relief. She then excused herself to the bathroom to take a moment to herself.

As she left the room, she followed the signs to the bathroom. She turned a corner and suddenly collided with someone.

"Oh god, i'm so sorry!" She rushed into an apology as she steadied herself.

"No worries, Little Lena."

Her head snapped up at the now all too familiar voice.

"You." She hissed.

Pen grinned playfully at her.

"Isn't it funny how we keep running into each other?"

She frowned, ignored him, and attempted to walk past. He, of course, wasn't having it, and stepped in her path.

"What's wrong, little Lena?" He teased. "Don't you wanna play with Pennywise?"

She stilled. Pennywise. That's what the losers called it. The clown. Pen. They were one and the same.

"I want nothing to do with you, or the clown, or any of this shit." She snapped, throwing her hands up in exasperation. "I didn't ask for this."

"You seemed to like the clown when he had you against the mirror." He mocked, his grin turning sour. "And you asked for this the moment you drove into Derry."

She glared at him, before noticing that Avery had come back inside.

Lena looked to Avery after a moment and motioned for her to go on. She was sure the conversation wouldn't last long. She turned back to Pen and scowled.

"I'm done with this shit. I want nothing to do with you. Clown or otherwise."

She turned to leave, but he grabbed her hand to stop her.

"Don't." She hissed, attempting to snatch her hand away. "I don't know who, or what, you really are, but stay away from me."

"You don't mean that." He muttered, giggling to himself. "I know what you really want."

"You don't know anything about me."

His grip on her hand tightened almost painfully. "Of course I do." He explained, leaning in to whisper in her ear. "I can see inside your head."

A jolt of shame and fear rushed through her. She tried again to snatch her hand from his grip, and this time he let her go. She looked into his eyes, and they seemed to almost glow. He grinned at her, and spoke again, the higher pitch back in his tone.

"Your fear smells so...lovely." He breathed.

He leaned in and she shut her eyes, waiting for something dangerous to happen. Nothing happened, and after a few moments, she opened her eyes. He was gone. He had slipped away into thin air again.

Lena did her best to collect herself before hurrying back to the room with everyone.

Upon reentering the room, she found that the seating had changed. Bill and Mike had moved closer, lost in deep conversation. Ben and Beverly were sharing a laugh, and Lena was quick to notice the blush on Ben's cheeks. The last arrangement intrigued her the most. Avery was sat in between Richie and Eddie, each man engaging her in conversation. Lena smirked internally at the large grin that erupted onto her friend's face as she made the men laugh. As she took the

unoccupied seat to Richie's right, a waitress approached the table and laid down the bill as well as some fortune cookies before taking her leave..

"Alright, guys!" Mike called out. "I think the check's a sign that we should get going and get you all checked into your rooms."

The others voiced their agreements, each one grabbing a fortune cookie off the bill as Mike passed it around.

"It's a shame Stan couldn't make it tonight." He continued "But I'm glad we were able to make some new friends."

He raised a glass in Lena and Avery's direction, and the girls smiled sheepishly. Lena noticed Bev's smile falter for a moment, but it was immediately put back into place.

"Enough of the speech, Mike, jeez." Richie teased. "You're turning into Bill."

The group shared some laughter and began cracking into their cookies. Lena would later think back to Richie's joke as the moment before all hell broke loose.

All that she could hear was her own heartbeat pounding in her ears. The note in her cookie burned into her eyes. "See you soon, Little Lena." Written in blood that burst into flames in her hand as soon as she had read it. She barely registered the panicked screaming of the Losers and Avery calling her name. She was stuck. Frozen. With fear, and something else. Something she didn't want to acknowledge.

Her daze was broken as calm settled and Avery pulled her out of the room. They were heading out of the restaurant, but were stopped as Richie was distracted by a kid. Lena wasn't able to hear his conversation with the kid, but noticed how frazzled the encounter made him. After his shouting, the kid simply shrugged at Richie and walked off. The group looked to Richie for an explanation.

"How was I supposed to know what he was referencing." He defended. "I don't write my own material."

"I knew it!" Avery and Eddie shouted in unison.

Lena laughed along, but it sounded hollow. Avery shot her a concerned look as they exited the building. The losers grouped up to make a call and argue amongst themselves, while Avery took Lena aside.

"Len?" She asked, her voice cracked in fear. "Please, tell me you're alright?"

Hearing the distress in Avery's tone, Lena looked to her friend's face. Avery had tears at the corners of her eyes and gave her a watery smile. I've been so stuck in my head, Lena thought, I haven't even thought of her.

"I'm alright, Aves." She promised, pulling her friend into a hug.

She knew as well as Avery did that she was lying through her teeth, but the lie is what they needed. She pulled away and gave her friend a look over. She could tell that much like her, Avery was shaken and trying to hold it together. That's when she heard the losers begin to argue. She only caught pieces of their conversation. Stan. Gone. Pennywise. Her heart ached as she watched them share a silent moment of grief.

"Okay, well, i am all for getting the fuck out of here." Richie announced at the end of the silence. "Anyone with me?"

Lena and Eddie swiftly shot up their hands. Ben and Beverly raised their hands slowly after a brief moment.

"Guys, c'mon!" "What? No!" Mike and Avery exclaimed in unison.

"We can't just leave." Avery pleads, her eyes darting between Lena, Eddie, and Richie.

Richie looked to her, expression portraying his sadness and doubt, before turning his back and walking to his car. Eddie watched Richie's retreating figure, then stepped forward to approach Avery.

"I'm sorry." He tried to reach for her, but she jerked away.

Lena laid an arm over her shoulder and pulled Avery into her side. She shot Eddie an apologetic look, and then lead Avery across the

parking lot to her car. Without a word, Avery handed Lena the keys. She accepted them, knowing that Avery wasn't in the state to drive. Though, she questioned to herself if she were either.

She knew Avery was taking everyone wanting to leave hard. They'd bonded so quickly with the Losers, and were so ready to have help in getting rid of what was haunting them all. The thought of everyone leaving them and Mike to defend themselves hurt. She knew it hurt Avery more, though. It wasn't hard to see that Avery had developed a crush or two.

The drive back to the inn was silent, and arrived just after everyone else. Avery avoided looking anyone in the eye as she exited the car, and bolted into the building. Lena watched as Bev and Ben shot Eddie and Richie looks as they went into the building. She then watched as the men played a game of rock, paper, scissors. Richie appeared to win, and the two shared sad smiles, before they went inside. She watched from the car and through the windows as he followed Avery's path upstairs to her room.

The idiots had played a kid's game to decide who would talk to Avery. Lena shook her head and couldn't help but laugh to herself. Her laughter abruptly cut off, though, as she heard another laugh ring through her ears. She stilled, and forced herself to look into the mirror. She looked to see the clown, leaning against the back seat of the car. His expression was one of calculating danger. She turned her head to look at the backseat without the mirror and found Pen, a grin on his face. She whipped her head back and forth a few times. Pen in the backseat his arms spread wide as he grinned. Pennywise, the clown, in the mirror in the exact same position, only with a snarl on his face.

"Hiya, Little Lena." He greeted her cheerfully. "How about we go for a drive?"

A look at the clown in the mirror let her know this was no request. She took a breath and started the car. I hope I make it back alive, was the last thing she thought to herself as she turned onto the street.

6. Ch6: I Know your Secret

"Pull in here and park."

They'd been driving for fifteen minutes. Pen giving direction, and her following. She had pulled into where he directed and found herself at a park. She parked in front of the main entrance. By a playground of all things.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Lena's mind raced with anxiety every second that ticked by.

"You don't have to worry." He said, breaking the silence.

She didn't move or make an attempt to respond.

"I didn't bring you here to kill you."

She turned and found him suddenly beside her, facing her. She raised an eyebrow skeptically at him.

"I could have." He shrugged. "But I didn't."

"Then why?" She asked.

"We needed to talk."

She frowned and motioned to their surroundings.

"In a creepy secluded playground?"

His lips twinged into a smile at her suspicious tone, but immediately turned down as he spoke.

"In a place where the Losers aren't a scream away."

They relapsed into silence. He drummed his fingers against his knees, as though he were a normal person with not a care in the world. She was frustrated. She wanted to leave, to run, to scream for help. She knew better though. Even just sitting beside him, she could feel the confidence and power rolling off of him in waves. She wouldn't even

make it five steps away if she tried.

With a sigh, she opened the door and stepped out of the car. She could feel his eyes on her as she walked away from the car. She stopped as she reached the playground and took a seat on one of the vacant swing sets. She stared up at the sky, kicking her legs just enough to move the swing.

She heard the crunch of leaves as he approached and sat in the swing next to her, but didn't bother looking to him.

"Why?" She asked.

Why this town? Why these people? Why children? Why me? Her mind ran through millions of why's. He chuckled, and she remembered what he'd said. He could see inside her head. She looked to him as he began to answer.

"I was here before the people. I need to survive. They taste better, more afraid." He counted each answer off of his fingers.

"And me?" She asked. "Why me?"

She wasn't sure why she asked. She was afraid to know the answer.

"There are people, like you, who smell...different." He explained. "When they appear in Derry as children, they are the first I eat. I never let them grow because they are dangerous."

She quirked her head to the side, confused.

"Dangerous? To you?"

He nodded, looking away from her and up to the sky.

"He sends them." He muttered, a scowl forming on his face. "He wants to tempt me with weakness."

She wanted to ask who. Who could he know that was strong enough to send him a weakness? What weakness could he possibly be made to have? She didn't ask though, because she could see him growing frustrated. He shook his head as if unclouding his own thoughts.

"Doesn't matter." He explained. "I won't become weak. I can have all that I want."

He looked back at her. His eyes seemed to glow as she looked into them. There it is again, she thought, that peaceful, floating feeling.

"I can have them, all of them, and you. They will join the rest, and you will be mine."

Mine. The word rang through her head, shaking her from her daze.

"Yours?" She asked, standing and stepping away from the swings. "I-no-what- you're-"

She stuttered as she stumbled back.

"Y-you're a monster. You're not human. You're a thing, a thing that kills innocent children."

He didn't rise from his seat, he didn't even look to her. He didn't have to.

"Are you trying to explain that to me? Or yourself?" He questioned. "I can see inside your head, remember? I can see what you won't admit. The secret you won't admit to me or to yourself."

She shut her eyes, bringing her arms around herself as if to shield from his words.

"You felt it the moment you came to Derry, just like I did. That's why I was there, waiting for you at the sign. You weren't coming for your friend or for them. You knew that you were coming for me."

She shook her head rapidly, trying not to let his words sink in. She could hear him approaching then, but she tried to block him out. She couldn't admit it, she wouldn't.

"Little Lena..." He called, almost gently.

She felt his hand touch hers and her eyes flew open. Brown human eyes locked with the glowing eyes of an ancient. He pulled her toward him as he unwrapped her arms from around herself. She was

shaking as she pressed against him. Though this time, not from fear. He pressed his lips down onto hers, and her doubts vanished.

Mine.

His voice rang through her head, and this time, she didn't deny it.

She was his now.

Richie walked up to her door, thankful that they had all exchanged room numbers at the restaurant. He took a deep breath and raised his hand to knock before he could talk himself out of it.

She swung the door open, her eyes registering shock as she noticed who was knocking. She tried to sound casual as she spoke..

"Can I help you?" She asked.

She winced internally as she realized how upset and croaky her tone was.

He rubbed the back of his neck nervously.

"I, uh, i wanted to talk." He managed to say.

She nodded and stood back so he could enter the room. She knew they needed to talk, especially if he and the others were leaving. She shut the door and he took a seat in a chair beside her bed. They sat in silence for some time, both of them wary to bring up the elephant in the room.

Avery was the one to break it. She had to know.

"Why do you have to leave?" She asked, so quietly it was almost a whisper. "Why can't you stay and fight?"

"I'm sorry, Avery." He replied, his voice thick with sadness. "You don't understand, it's just too hard to be here."

Her facade of strength crumbled. And everything she'd been holding in poured out.

"You don't understand, Richie!" She cried. "It told me the truth! That stupid cookie showed me the end of this! If you leave, I can't save all of us. I can't save you and-and-I can't save-"

She laid her face in her hands, and her words devolved into sobs.

Richie ran a hand through his dark curls and sighed. He wasn't good at comforting people. For God's sake, he used humor to deflect and bury his own issues...but seeing her breakdown...It made something in him snap into place.

"Hey, hey, Avery, it's okay." He soothed, moving toward her.

He placed an arm around her, and pulled her into his side.

"Whatever that stupid cookie said, whatever that fucking clown does, we won't leave." He promised. "We'll stay, and we'll kick its ass, and everything will be alright."

Her cries devolved into sniffles and hiccups, as she looked up and listened as he spoke. Richie felt his heart beat faster at the look in her eyes.

Admiration, warmth, and...attraction, shining clear in her eyes.

If the past days hadn't been so surreal and terrifying, Avery would have sworn she was dreaming. She was in her room, in Richie Tozier's arms, as he comforted her. He reached a hand up to her cheek and wiped away a tear as it fell.

She locked eyes with him, and without thinking, leaned forward and pressed her lips to his.

Richie was shocked, but found himself kissing her back. She was kind, and beautiful, and he hadn't felt anything like this in so long. He hadn't really wanted anyone since...

Avery was about to pull away when he kissed her back. She was mentally prepared to be shoved off of him and rejected, not to be pulled closer against him.

He nipped at her bottom lip and she moaned. The sound spurred him

on, and he brought his lips to her neck. It was only when he bit down on her collarbone, that Avery snapped into reality.

"Richie." She breathed, pulling away from him slowly. "We have to stop."

He pulled away, blushing furiously, and gently slid Avery off of his lap. He stood up and began pacing back and forth. He cursed under his breath.

"I'm so sorry, Avery." He apologized, and then went on rambling. "I have no idea what got into me. I haven't felt like this in years. Not since I left Derry. I have no idea how to handle feelings. God, the only other person I've felt like this for is fucking Eddie."

A gasp left Avery's lips. Richie turned to him, eyes wide and mouth agape. Beep Beep, Richie, you fucking idiot, he thought to himself.